The white students went to schools that were all white.

There were segregated lunch counters.

I mean, actually, black people couldn't go to the lunch counters.

They had to take their food to go.

There were segregated facilities to go to the bathroom.

You couldn't go into hotels.

And so when you traveled, most of us took our food with us.

You've heard stories about lunches being packed in shoeboxes and things like that.

Well, it certainly is not far from the truth, because it was much more convenient for us to take food on any trip that we went on than to try to stop at some restaurant to get food and go around to the back.

Now, you said all your schools were segregated as well.

Do you think that gave you any kind of an edge?

I think it gave me an edge in the sense that the teachers were very concerned about the students, Even though Brown vs Board of Education, of course, was decided in 1954.

At that time, I was six years old, and so, theoretically, I should have been going to integrated schools.

But I really am very happy with the education that I got because my teachers were very concerned, and they did not want to see any of us fail.

They did not want us to not live up to our potential.

And so I think I felt that that gave me an advantage in the sense of I knew that if I didn't do what I was supposed to do, the teachers were concerned enough to talk to my father.

My father was concerned enough to make sure that I understood that it was my job, and my only job was to go to school and get good grades.

Given that, did you ever once envision that you would become a judge, let alone a Supreme Court justice?

Quite frankly, no.

In fact, the law was not on my radar screen.

I really enjoyed the sciences when I was in elementary and high school, and I had every intention of becoming a doctor.

So to that end, when I went to undergraduate school, I actually majored in zoology, and that's what my undergraduate degree is in.

What exactly led you into the legal field?

Well, I grew up during the civil rights era.

When I was in college, there were a lot of riots taking place.

We had students taking over the administration building at various colleges.

We had the war in Vietnam.

I mean, it was a very volatile time in our country's history, and everything, it seemed to me, led to the law.

And so that's how I got interested in law and attending law school.

So when you decided to go to law school, were many women venturing into the legal field?

No, there were very few women.

I would venture to say that less than a fourth of the class, women.

And even fewer, of course, were black females.

So what obstacles did you specifically encounter as a black person and or as a black female?

Well, you have to first start off with knowing that this was my first integrated situation law school.

As I said, I attended all black elementary and high school, and I attended undergraduate, graduate school at Howard University, which was basically a black school.

There were some white professors there.

There were a lot of international students from all over the world.

So there were some white people at Howard University, but it was still essentially a black school.

And so my first real integrated situation was at Catholic University.

And I really knew that there were professors there who didn't believe that black people should be in law school.

And it came across very clearly.

I had one professor who would never call on me in class, and I had one professor who even said that he felt it was his obligation to weed out the incompetence, and he was looking at the black students.

So you have that kind of attitude with some people.

It was not all of the professors.

It was not all of the students, but there were professors and students who felt that black students should not be there.

What prompted you to go to Catholic?

I mean, it was in D.C. i understand, but what?

Well, I wanted to stay in D.C. so I did apply to Howard University, and the Catholic.

I don't believe I applied to Georgetown or American.

And quite frankly, I went to Catholic because it was in D.C. and because they gave me some scholarship money.

That's always very good because, you know, I came from a family of five, a single parent, my father, and he just did not have the resources to send me to undergraduate school, and certainly not to law school.

And so I had to make sure that I could get scholarship and grant money and work if I needed to, you know, to make my way.

Now, would you say that you were politically involved as a young adult?

Somewhat.

I mean, I participated when I was in undergraduate school and the taking over of the administration, the sit in, I shouldn't say taking over, but the sit in at the administration building at Howard.

And so I was very aware of the Stokely Carmichael and the Black Panther Party and those kinds of issues.

And so I made myself aware of what was going on, and I participated to the extent that I felt that I could.

Could you tell me about your legal career prior to becoming a judge?

Okay.

Well, when I first finished law school, I worked with the D.C. government.

It was my first job out of law school, and it was with the rental accommodations office.

D.C. had just passed a rent Control law went on than to try to stop.

Black Panther Party and those kinds of issues.

And so I made myself aware of what was going on, and I participated to the extent that I felt that I could.

Could you vote?

Tell me about your legal career prior to becoming a judge.

Oh, okay.

Well, when I first finished law school, I worked with the D.C. government.

It was my first job out of law school, and it was with the rental accommodations office.

D.C. had just passed a rent control law, and this office, the Rental Accommodations Office, was administering that rent control law.

And so I was a hearing officer with that office.

I heard petitions from landlords to increase the rents, and I actually heard petitions from the tenants to decrease their rents if the landlord was not keeping up the property, whatever their issues may have been.

And so that was my first job out of law school.

Then I moved to back home to Virginia, and I worked with a couple of lawyers there doing basically domestic relations work and doing real estate work, closings, title searches, that kind of work.

And then I got married, and my husband and I.

My husband was from Bradenton, Florida.

His mother became ill, and so we decided, yes, and we decided to move to Bradenton to be with his mother.

And Bradenton, I did a, for a short period of time, a private practice there until I got a job with the Attorney General's office in the state of Florida.

And even though I lived in Bradenton and this Attorney General's office was in Tampa, I commuted to Tampa for a short period of time.

And once his mother was better, we decided to move to Tampa.

So I was with the Attorney General's office in Tampa for about 13 and a half years.

I did criminal appeals.

I did a lot of death penalty work at that office.

And I was the bureau chief at that office for five years before I was appointed to the Second District Court of Appeals.

What prompted you to apply for a judge?

Well, I had never.

When I went to law school, I did not know any lawyers.

I did not know any judges, and I never really thought about being a judge.

But I've been with the Attorney General's office, as I said, for 13 and a half years.

And I decided I wanted to continue in the appellate arena.

And so I decided to apply for a judgeship.

I thought it was really just a logical next step in an appellate career.

So I decided to apply to the Second District Court of Appeal.

And fortunately, the second time I applied, I. I was in fact appointed to that court by the late Governor Lord and Childs.

And you had told me about your encounters as Americans have you met, Encountered lady racism?

Well, you know, my first.

And I was just talking to some law students yesterday, and I told them about the first case I handled as a lawyer.

I came to the courtroom and I thought that I actually, I thought I looked like how all of the other lawyers looked.

And I was sitting there in court and my client's case was called.

And as I walked up to the podium to approach the judge, the judge said to me, who are you, the defendant?

Well, first of all, the person was a male, and I didn't think I looked like a defendant.

So I politely kept approaching the bench.

I took out my bar card.

I showed him a copy of my bar card and said, my name is Peggy Quince.

I'm here representing the defendant.

And what was your response?

I said, oh, okay.

I mean, and it was my.

This was.

This would have been 1975.

But, you know, I had to handle it that way because I was there representing a client.

And although I was pretty upset with the judge, my client was the most important person in this proceeding, and I did not want to do anything that was going to adversely affect his case.

So I just smiled at the judge, did what I thought was appropriate, and explained to him who I was and just kind of, for lack of a better word, see the quiet way.

Now, considering that, how important do you feel it is to teach American history to our young people, including that of slavery and civil teaching?

Slavery?

Well, teaching about slavery and teaching students, meaning how the government works.

There's another question here that I'm going to ask you.

Meaning, which is, do you feel that the public understands how the three branches of government are supposed to work?

Okay.

Which may answer this question.

Well, I think it's very important that we all understand history and we all understand how this country was formed and how it got to be the country that it is.

And slavery is a very important aspect of that history because this country was really founded and prospered on the backs of people who came here not willingly.

There are many people who come to this country, and they willingly come because they're seeking a better life.

But I think young people need to understand that we are not the goody goody country that we often portray ourselves to the rest of the world.

We dealt in human bondage.

Slaves could not go and do what they wanted to do.

And they were often whipped and more severe punishments melted out to them if they tried to get away.

That some people did, in fact, flee because they did not want to be in bondage.

And so I think People need to understand that this is part of the foundation of this country and that the people who are here did not come voluntarily, but they are here now.

Their descendants are here, and their descendants have as much right to be in this country as anyone else.

And I think that ties into what all of these young people need to understand about our country.

They need to understand that even though we have a great, I believe, great Constitution, that that Constitution did not always include everyone.

And they need to understand that it has now been interpreted to include all of us and that we need to treat each other as we are, and that is fellow citizens and the civics portion.

Oh, my goodness.

You know, every time you read some kind of article, we found out how little our young people know about this country.

They don't understand the fundamentals of the three branches of government.

You know, every so often I read and I teach about the Declaration of Independence and the Declaration of Independence, when you go back and look at it, it really is an indictment against England, against King George and how they were treating the people in the colonies.

And so based on that treatment, the founders, when they proposed the Constitution, proposed it so that no one branch, no one group, no one person would have all of the power.

And so that's why we have the executive branch in the form of the President or the governor of all the states.

That's why we have the legislature in the form of Congress, and in the states, our legislative bodies of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

And that's why we have the courts, because the courts are really, I believe, the safeguard for the people against the other branches of government.

So I think people need to understand the importance of each branch, the separation of powers of each branch and the independence of each branch.

Now, if you could speak with any of the founding Fathers in the writers of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, who would it be and why?

Oh, my goodness, I don't know that I could pick out any one of them because I think it's important that they all got together and collaborated on both of those documents.

And so I think I would just want to talk to all of them and explain to them that they had some great words in those documents, but as they went along, they really put some limitations on those words.

I mean, when you think about the fact that they said we hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, well then they turn around and make some people not so equal.

And you know, and you had to be a landowner to be able to vote and those kinds of things.

And so I would tell them that they should have stuck to that really original premise that all men, meaning all men and all women are created equal.

And of course, we know that the women certainly were not equal.

Now, what are some of the positive changes you have seen during your legal career?

We're not talking about the bench.

I'm not talking about specific cases.

That is a question I'm going to ask.

But right now I want to know what positive changes have you seen during your legal career that you feel to be the most significant?

Well, I think the positive change overall is that there are more blacks, more Hispanics, more people of other backgrounds who are in the legal profession, because, quite frankly, it is quite intimidating.

And I've seen it for myself when you walk into a situation and you're the only person that looked like you in that situation.

I can remember once I even went to a bar association meeting, and it was down in this part of the state.

I believe it may have been in West Palm Beach.

And I was explaining to them that it's very uncomfortable when you walk into a room and there is no one that looks like you in the room.

And so often that was the case with people of color.

When they walked into a courtroom, the judge would be walking white, the bailiff would be white, the clerk of court would be white, all the attorneys would be white.

And you already have a feeling that, you know you're not going to get a fair shot looking at the judiciary and the Supreme Court and just the judiciary in general, not only in the state of Florida, but throughout this country.

How important, how important or necessary is it to have an independent judiciary?

Well, I cannot stress enough how important it is to have an independent judiciary, because people come to the court to have some of the most serious matters in their lives adjudicated, and they certainly want to not only have the appearance, but have a fair opportunity to present their case, and a fair opportunity to have someone really decide the issues based on the facts and the law and not decide the issues based on how the people feel or how the executive may feel or how the legislative may feel.

And so it is very important that judges are fair and impartial, that judges make decisions based simply on the facts and the law and the Constitution.

So I cannot overemphasize how important, important it is to make sure our courts stay fair and impartial.

And what would you say are some of the most significant cases you have heard during your tenure on the Supreme Court?

You know, I knew you were going to ask me that question.

And I honestly thought about it, but I cannot actually give you a true answer to that, because I think the cases that come before the Supreme Court and based on our limited jurisdiction, all of those cases are so really important to the people of the state of Florida, and of course they're important to the individual litigants.

But the cases that come before the Supreme Court are cases that truly interpret the law.

We often, you know, one of our.

A bulk of our cases or cases based on conflict of decisions between district courts of appeal, we're here now in Broward.

Broward is a part of the fourth District Court of Appeal.

The fourth District Court of Appeal may decide an issue of law one way.

And then Miami, which is a part of the third District Court of the peel and only a few miles away, actually may decide the same issue of law in a different manner.

So that case may come before us that would resolve that issue, decide which of those district courts of appeal actually decided the case in the proper manner, and therefore, what should be decided by all courts all over the state so that every citizen is being treated the same way doesn't matter whether you live in Miami or live here in Fort Lauderdale, you should be treated and the law should be applied the same way.

And so because those cases are so important, I can't really pick out any one or even group of cases that I think are the most important that we've heard, although I really think recently, over the last year or two, we had the voting cases, redistricting.

You know, the people of this state passed a constitutional amendment where there were certain criteria that was required in order to do redistricting.

And so we, the case came before us in the last redistricting case to determine if that criteria had in fact been applied.

And I think that's very important because the people had spoken, the people said, this is what we want you to look at when you are making these redistricting issues.

And so that all leads into whether or not people's.

You're really having one man, one vote.

And so I think to that extent, that was really a very important case because it really goes to one of the core rights and responsibilities we have in this state.

But I go back to what I said earlier.

It is really hard to pick out any set of cases that I think are the most important, because all of the cases I think, that come before the Supreme Court are really important for the people of the state.

I guess I'm going to get away from the court for just a few seconds and ask you how important Is it to you to be involved in the community?

Well, I truly believe in the, the saying that to whom much is given, much is required.

And I have had been given much in my life and I believe that I have to give back to my community.

And I don't think that being a judge should isolate you from helping others, being a part of your community, letting the people in your community know that you care.

And so, so I do what I can in my community.

I can't do pro bono work.

You never know which case is going to come before the court.

But I can do other things and I try to do other things.

You know, I've worked with, mentoring with young people and I've done any number of speaking engagements at schools and volunteering at schools.

And so I think that we can find something to do in our communities that's not going to conflict with our job responsibilities.

And it is so important because our communities need us.

Our communities need every person who can to do things to, to help and especially to help those that are less fortunate.

When you are looking back over at realizing that this part of your legal career is almost over, what are you thinking?

Well, actually, I'm thinking that I've had a wonderful legal career and I will remain active, an active lawyer.

And I really think that I still should give back to my community.

And so I am going to be trying to decide over the next year how I'm going to give back to my community.

I know that I want to do some garden ad litem work because the children are the most vulnerable and I think that they need our help more now than ever.

So I really want to do that.

But I'd also like to do some other kinds of work.

Maybe volunteer with the Southern Poverty Law center, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the aclu, something like that that might have a, a more global impact.

And finally, what are your immediate plans post Supreme Court?

Meaning are you taking a long vacation?

Are you traveling to Tahiti or post right after?

You know, it's funny you should mention Tahiti.

Oh, because I am going to Tahiti as a part of a cruise that I am going to take.

But it's one of, it's just one of many stops on this cruise.

So yeah, my, my first priority is to sort of relax and for about four months and then, and during that relaxation period, I'm really going to decide what I'm to going to do for the other half of my life.

Okay.

Justice Spencer, I believe that was my final question.

And I thank you so much again for agreeing to sit down with me today and do this interview.

I hope that I didn't bug you too much with these questions.

I enjoyed doing it.

And just thank you for being here.

It was my pleasure.

Thank you.